



Gomshall and the North Downs

Distance: 5 km=3½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Gomshall

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Woodland, hills, village, pubs

In Brief

This is an unusual walk, mainly through woodland but with great views, taking you over the North Downs to the village of Gomshall and back, on little-known but very clear paths. You have to make a descent down into the village and up again over the hills. On the GPS, this walk measures just over 3½ miles but it may seem longer because of the gradients. There is excellent food and drink in Gomshall, highly recommended by walkers.



There are *no stiles*, but in summer you will find nettles along some of the way. In winter, you will encounter several patches of mud, but if you have boots you will have no problems at all. There is one rather steep short slope to go down where you may find a walking pole useful. From 2023-4 you will need to step over or circumnavigate swathes of fallen ash trees. This is a popular area for dog owners with little restriction except in the village.

The walk begins at a small parking area off Green Dene/Combe Lane, the lane that runs from East Horsley towards Shere. There is room for about eight cars and there is no sign. The parking area is in front of a horizontal metal barrier and a fingerpost pointing to a bridleway and is at a distinct **bend in the road**. (If you have a map, this is precisely where Green Dene ends and Combe Lane begins.) If you come from East Horsley, it is on the left, at a right bend, just over 1 km (0.7 mile) after the Sheepleas car park and Larchwood House (with the grey wooden cladding). If you come from the direction of Shere or the Clandons, it is on the right, at a left bend, 1 mile after the junction with Staple Lane. Don't block access to the barrier! At a pinch, you can park on the verge, either adjoining or a little way along the lane. The nearest postcode is **KT24 5TA**. The grid ref is **TQ 083 499**, www.w3w.co/employ.curvy.rooms. **Warning! isolated car park: leave car visibly empty - see Guidelines.** You could also begin the walk in Gomshall, **postcode GU5 9LB**, either by car or **by rail**. For a map, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



for a further 180m and turn **right** at the *next* little wooden gate; veer **left** on the intended path when you reach it after 150m.]

3



Keep straight ahead, passing a bench, ignoring a right-pointing yellow arrow, to reach a specially attractive spot with perfect green grass and fine views into the valley. Continue downhill to reach a knoll formed from a wartime bunker where there is a new bench seat. Go steeply down (careful! you can slalom through the grass) and keep straight ahead, ignoring a waymarked path on the right, till the path veers right by a fence and leads you through a wooden swing-gate. Continue straight ahead, ignoring paths on your left, to go through another wooden swing-gate next to a National Trust (NT) sign for *Hackhurst Down*. Keep straight on now along the open **level** hillside, for nearly 200m. This is a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and you may see some gentle belted Galloway cattle. At the far end, by a marker post, veer **left** downhill, re-joining the footpath and going through a small wooden gate by another NT sign. *You are on part of the National Trust's "Walk The Chalk" trail.*

4

The path curves steeply downhill with a picturesque green field and valley to your right, with Colekitchen Farm on view. Ignore a small private wooden gate on your right to meet a post with a yellow arrow. Your footpath bears **left** (with a narrow woodland path on the left in case of mud) to run alongside a fenced meadow. It now bends **right** under beeches and conifers, between fields. You cross a farm track via two swing-gates, where you may see more of those belted Galloway cattle in Edmonds Farm on your left. [Apr 2024: there's a fallen tree across the path with a loop round on the left to avoid it.] The path descends to Colekitchen Lane. Turn **left** to reach the main road in Gomshall. The walk continues **right** along the road but first you will want to turn left for refreshments and a short detour to the village.



There are several places to eat and drink in Gomshall, making it a favourite excursion for families and trippers. The village shop is followed by "The Compasses" which has been in the Good Beer Guide for several years; it has a large dining room and is open all day; it has a beer garden alongside the Tillingbourne Stream. The Gomshall Mill Inn freehouse, a converted mill house, was bought by Farnham-based New Dawn Pubs, is now fully open. It is worth visiting to see the stream that still runs beneath the floor and to enjoy the elaborate menu. Note the pillory! Further along there is Albert's pop-up café.

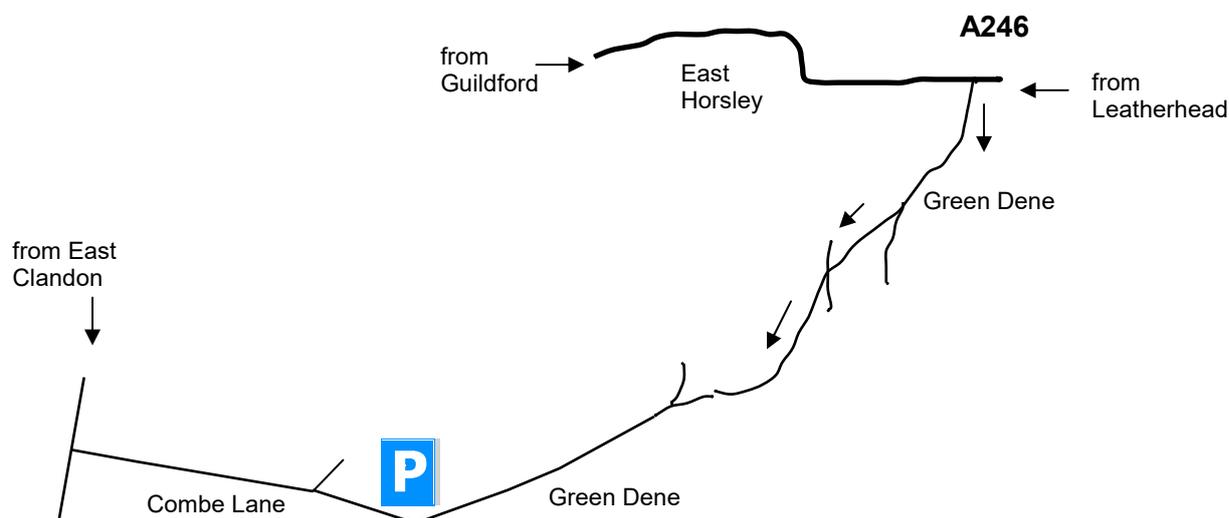
Welcome to Gumesele or Gomeselle, as it was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 after a Saxon feudal past. Leather tanning, watercress cultivation, corn milling, spinning and weaving, fulling and pelting, all helped it prosper, thanks to its lifeblood, the Tillingbourne. (You will pass the Old Tannery at the western end.) Gomshall grew under the Normans and was split into three manors. For the 1380 Poll Tax (yes - 1989 was not the first!), Gomshall registered 267 names. A year later, many villagers joined the Peasants' Revolt. Their gripe was against the church-owned mills' right to take a big slice of the grain and even to confiscate the do-it-yourself grinding stones.

The Domesday record shows "1 mill worth 3s 4d". The present Gomshall mill grew out of that modest one, milling wheat for the rather course bread and also barley for malting in Guildford. You can see some of the 1600s-vintage machinery in the Inn that now serves the site. At first the mill was "undershot" with the stream driving the paddles from below. In 1839 it was converted to an "overshot" wheel, a much more efficient arrangement that makes use of the extra gravity of the water flowing over the wheel. Despite competition from more modern techniques, the mill continued to function until 1953.

- 5 After a possible refreshment break, go back to the junction with the lane and continue on the main road passing a filling station (with a shop) and a side road. Almost immediately, at a fingerpost and a National Trust sign for *Netley Park*, go **right** on a footpath up steps and through a wooden barrier. The path goes under tall yews. In 250m you pass a very long felled tree trunk (*note carefully!*). In another 40m or so, your path begins to zigzag under more yews, and here your path forks. Take the **right** fork, the narrower-looking option, into trees. *This right fork is the true footpath: the wide more open left fork under beeches has widened in past years causing some to miss this vital turning.* In a further 150m you meet on your left a post with a yellow arrow indicating a very clear fork in the path. Take the **right** fork going steeply up. In 40m, by another markerpost, at an oblique T-junction, veer **right** to reach another T-junction in 25m.
- 6 Turn sharp **left** here on a dirt bridleway. *This path will take you, with several twists, back to the car park.* You soon pass on your left a concealed wartime pillbox. Stay on the main path as it gradually bears right. 300m after you joined this bridleway, you come to a marker post and a 3-way junction at the highest point on this walk: keep **right** here. In a further 200m your path merges with a muddy track coming from the right and you immediately reach a 4-way fingerpost on the North Downs Way (NDW), a wide surfaced crossing track.
- 7 **Cross straight over** the NDW, onto a gloomy slanting bridleway opposite. Because of the tall pines, this path is rougher and muddier than the paths you have been walking on and it soon gets quite narrow. You pass a gorse felled area on your left and in a total of 350m you reach a wide crossing track. Turn **left** for 5m and immediately **right** to resume your course on the bridleway. After 100m you reach another wide surfaced forestry track. *If the ground has been muddy (ok in 2024), you have a clean alternative return route: turn **right** on the forestry track and, in 250m, turn **left** at a junction uphill on another good path, back to the parking area. Otherwise:* Cross straight over the diagonal crossing forestry track (depending on where you came out onto the forestry track, you may have to go **right** on it for up to 20m) to continue on the bridleway. Soon, you arrive back at the makeshift parking area where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: to get to Green Dene / Combe Lane from the London area, take the Leatherhead-Dorking Road, the A246. After the junction with traffic lights at Effingham, go over 1 km (nearly 1 mile) towards Guildford, till you pass the sign for East Horsley and the road widens. Here look out for a signpost on the left to Green Dene, Sheepleas and Shere. This is Green Dene Lane. (If coming from the Guildford direction, this will be on the right.) Follow this lane, later taking the main right fork, still in the direction of Shere. Ignore further turnings off for about another 2½ km=1.7 miles to a right bend and park here on the left. (See intro.)



By train: Gomshall station. Regular service from Guildford or Dorking.

By bus: nos. 23 and 25 from Guildford to Gomshall. Check the timetables.

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